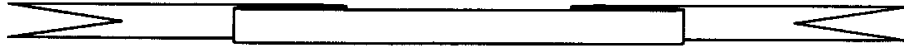


## History of Roanoke County, Virginia



In the 1740s, the first Scotch-Irish and German settlers reached the upper Roanoke Valley by traveling from Pennsylvania through the Shenandoah Valley. They were joined by Tidewater Virginians of English ancestry who journeyed up the valleys of the James and Roanoke Rivers.

Roanoke County, named after the Roanoke River, was formed in 1838 from a portion of Botetourt County, which had boundaries extending west to the Mississippi River. Roanoke County's name comes from the Indian word "Rawrenock", which means wampum. Wampum were white shell beads worn by Native Americans. This explanation comes from Captain John Smith, who wrote about the origins of Roanoke Island in North Carolina's Albermarle Sound.

Most of Roanoke County was rural in nature and farming was predominant throughout the area. By the latter half of the 20th century, Roanoke County was in transition from farm to factory, but the County's rural population was still relatively large in 1920.

The County today has a population of approximately 85,778 and is a mostly suburban area that surrounds the City of Roanoke. Its 251 square miles include the Town of Vinton; Hollins, home of prestigious Hollins University for women; and historic Bonsack. A diversified economic base provides security from market fluctuations related to particular products.\*

Roanoke County's pioneering spirit extends to modern times. In 1989, Roanoke County was named an All-American City. Regional cooperation, public-private partnerships, citizen involvement, innovation, and quality services provide the foundation for Roanoke County's strength. The County was the first in the state to have curbside recycling, and in 1996, the library system began offering free public access to the Internet.

The Department of Engineering and Inspections acquired a 50/50 grant from the U.S. Corps of Engineers to develop a GIS mapping system providing digital orthophotos, topographic and planimetric features. Integration with the County's E-911 dispatch system, school bus and solid waste vehicle routing, and utility department is planned.

The County participates in the Roanoke Regional Airport Commission, formed in 1987. Mutual concern for valley air service and growth resulted in a two million-dollar contribution from the County over a ten-year period. This is representative of a new cooperative, promotional spirit that is emerging in the Roanoke Valley between local governments. In addition, the County has been nationally recognized for governmental cooperation with Botetourt County. Past cooperative efforts between the two counties include the building of a joint industrial park and a library.

In November 1992, the Roanoke County Police Department became the first nationally accredited department in Southwest Virginia. Existing departmental programs, including criminal investigations, traffic enforcement, domestic violence, crime prevention, criminal apprehension, and community-involved policing, were enhanced through the accreditation process.

Roanoke County has positioned itself well to face the challenges of the next century. Early in 1996, the County began supplying residents with fresh water from the new Spring Hollow Reservoir Water System. The system consists of a dam, reservoir, water treatment facility, and pump station as well as distribution storage and transmission lines. The system is the culmination of a 20-year search for a new water supply for the Roanoke Valley, and is located at the foot of Poor Mountain in West Roanoke County. This water supply will be sufficient to last the county for the next 50 years. The water treatment facility will be sufficient through the year 2010, at which time it can easily be expanded to provide additional treatment capacity.

The Roanoke Valley Resource Authority was established on October 23, 1991 under a user agreement between the County of Roanoke, the City of Roanoke and the Town of Vinton to develop a regional solid waste disposal facility. A seven-member board appointed by the governing bodies of the Charter Members presently governs the Authority. The County has control over the budget and financing of the Authority only to the extent of representation by board members appointed. The old regional sanitary landfill operated by the Roanoke Valley Regional Solid Waste Management Board was closed on September 30, 1993.

Explore Park, a unique recreational and educational experience located in east county near Vinton, is the County's tourism focus. Upon completion, Explore Park will include a frontier settlement, North American wilderness zoological park, and environmental education center. The park will be completed in various phases with a major emphasis on environmental preservation.

From its beginning, Roanoke County has served as a catalyst for growth and unity in the Roanoke Valley. In fact, most of the present day neighborhoods in the Valley started life within Roanoke County. The County continues to support this cooperative spirit with its citizens, private commercial and industrial interests, and area localities.